Dr. John M. Newman The Race Issue and the presidential campaign of 1960 Part 2.

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Dr. John M. Newman
JFK, MLK, RFK
The Race Issue and the presidential campaign of 1960 Part 2.

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Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project: https://valleyblackheritage.org/index.html

Dr. Newman online: https://jfkjmn.com/

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and finally on the evening of 11 June 1963 the president delivered a televised address to the nation to announce he would send comprehensive civil rights legislation to Congress including access to public facilities voting rights and technical and monetary support for school desegregation he said the heart of the question is whether all Americans might have been afforded equal rights and equal opportunities 100 years of delay have passed since Lincoln freed the slaves yet their heirs their grandsons are not fully free those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence the racists answered that same evening when segregationist Byron de la Beckwith murdered mrs. Mississippi n-double-a-cp field secretary Medgar Evers JFK himself had just a little over five months left to live our case first dealings with Martin Luther King during the Kennedy presidency had been tense Bobby authorized FBI surveillance of King as the Attorney General and King resented having to ask RFK for help a key spring 1963 conference between black leaders and Robert Kennedy arranged by African American author James Baldwin was rocking and argumentative Bobby was shocked by the criticism of Jerome Smith

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shocked by the criticism of Jerome Smith civil rights worker who had been beaten and jailed in Mississippi referring to the Justice Department at this meeting he Smith said quote I've seen you guys stand around and do nothing more than take notes while we were being beaten unquote Bobby took it personally he argued with Smith and after three hours of debate the black participants walked many of them senior civil rights leaders and and the intellectuals walked out and discussed however with that rocky beginning amazingly eventually what can only be described as an extraordinary transformation Bobby Kennedy later became the undisputed white champion of civil rights for african-americans they said Bobby's white and right after JFK's assassination RFK became a Senator for New York he embraced the plight of minorities and he joined the presidential race belatedly and reluctantly and campaigned on policies to close the gaps that existed between black and white rich and poor like senator Eugene McCarthy a candidate also for the presidency and he opposing the Vietnam War he emphasized the need to combat racial injustice and economic inequality his appeal to minority voters broaden and skyrocketed after his impromptu eulogy to dr. King in

Indianapolis during the moments that night after his assassination Bobby's speech endowed him with an exalted status even among the most alienated African Americans afterward Indianapolis was hailed as an island of

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Indianapolis was hailed as an island of calm during that holy week uprising that saw riots break out in more than 100 US cities the King murder reinforced that Bobby was the one Caucasian in America trusted by african-americans Kennedy's own assassination just a few months after King's was a crushing blow to Americans who sought to right the wrongs of the nation at home and abroad the train with this casket from New York to Washington was aligned with African Americans saying goodbye alright well that brings me to the main topic that I wanted to discuss with you this evening the race issue in 1960 in the election of John Kennedy slavery was our original sin for a long time the race issue has been a dark shadow hanging over our republic and we're still cursed by it today fewer issues in our history cut as deeply into the fabric of American identity and moral purpose in the 20th century civil rights for African Americans became inextricably intertwined with the Kennedy presidency more so than any other presidency except for Lincoln himself by 1960 one century after emancipation southern white bigotry have succeeded in clawing back almost every step towards racial justice safer slavery itself amesh tin American electoral politics segregation had become part of the American landscape where African Americans were able to vote their votes were firmly in the

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vote their votes were firmly in the electoral block box of the party of Lincoln the Republican Party by an active Providence a series of events occurred late in the 1960 presidential campaign that changed the course of history white Americans who lived through the 1960 election do not remember the role the great race replayed in the outcome but the truth is that the crucial role of the 1960 African American vote has been overlooked especially as I have been recedes into the past historians of the civil rights movement know differently in my presentation today I will lay out what I believe was a causal chain of six race related events that led the Kennedys victory in nineteen in the 1960 election these six events took place during a crucial 14 day period just before the election itself in the following order 17 October JFK skull the proposed meeting with dr. Kane because he wasn't at that meeting he showed up with the students at the lunch counter and was arrested that for the first time in his life has spent his first night in jail without those events happening he would not have been before the judge in Georgia who actually said you know what even though I'm all you got my letting all you guys out on bond you're wanted on another charge in the adjacent county DeKalb so King was transferred to the Reidsville Federal Penitentiary approximately 10 a.m. on 26 October

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approximately 10 a.m. on 26 October Kennedy makes a sympathy call to Coretta King the next day Robert Kennedy makes a call to judge Mitchell and dekalb securing King's release and on 28 October the next day the blue bomb a scheme has secretly launched pamphlets and those who bomb pants are distributed on Sunday 602 days before the election and I've got a display of that over there and in the corner of the real deal and I'll take you through these six events briefly but first let me just say this it's my contention that each one of these events had to occur in order that the next event take place and if any of these six events didn't take place John Kennedy would never been elected as president there would have been no new frontier no Keynes in economics no increased minimum wage no depressed areas development all the other good things he did Medicare Medicaid Peace Corps or so on in popular wisdom the shaping force and dr. King's thinking was Mahatma Gandhi however it was the eminent American theologies Reinhold Niebuhr who fundamentally shaped King's religious views this is from the papers of Martin Luther King said that Niebuhr this is king speaking now Niebuhr has extraordinary insight of the human nature especially the behavior of nations and social groups he's keenly aware the complexity of human motives and of the relation between morality and power his theology is a persistent reminder of the reality of sin on every level of man's existence

these elements and neighbors thinking helped me to recognize the illusions of the superficial optimism concerning human nature and the dangers of a false idealism while I still believe the man's potential for good niebuhr made me

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potential for good niebuhr made me realize his potential for evil moreover niebuhr helped me to recognize the complexity of man's social involvement and the glaring reality of collective evil he did his PhD Association by the way all neighbor and leavers moral man and immoral society was published in 1932 when King was just three years old that work was the beginning of the end of classical liberalism in American theology because NEPA successfully attacked the social Gospels premise that the modern advance of reasons could eliminate social evils niebuhr argued that there was no evidence that human beings became less predatory as they became better educated a pacifist and strong proponent of Gandhi on the Faculty of Crozier George W Davis where King earned his Bachelor of divinity introduced King to Frederick Fischer's that strange little brown man of India Gandhi Nibiru's interest in Gandhi's methods was not lost on King Gandhi's methods belonged to a type of coercion that offered the best opportunities for a harmonious relationship with the moral and rational factors of social life thus non-violence was a strategic instrument for an oppressed group hopelessly in the minority with no possibility of developing sufficient power to set against its oppressors neither argued that when correctly applied to the cause of african-americans Gandhi's methods could work against injustice and the selfish forces of the immoral society Niebuhr actually used the term nonviolent coercion to describe it

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nonviolent coercion and resistance in short is a type of coercion which offers the largest opportunities I just read that goodnight however a large number of individual white men who will identify themselves completely with the Negro cause the white race in America will not admit the Negro to equal rights if it is not forced to do so upon that point one may speak with the dogmatism which all history justifies by the way if you're in my sixties class understand that a course of non-violence is a term that's worth about six points on your final exam you will need to remember those two words together this is what nonviolent coercion looks like he successfully applied the strategy of course of non-violence King did in the humbleness years the Kennedy presidency in that racists in each of these protests or sit-ins or things that were legal but not accepted coerced the racist to all kinds of actions because of their racial hatred they had no ability to withhold their hatred and their and beating people up and doing something like this and think you know ice cream and so does on the heads of the people just sitting there at the lunch counter and at the same time it coerced the government to enforce the laws so it was a pretty good strategy it was just very scary putting your body on the line which is what they had to do the race issue during the Kennedy administration can't be understood apart from Kings strategy and Kennedy's

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from Kings strategy and Kennedy's reluctance to embrace it this scene by the way and this picture was repeated just two weeks before the election only King is in the picture right when he gets arrested okay so what happens is that they keep of this policy may be back here after Kennedy won the Democratic nomination King became the target of three conflicting forces they convert on him at the time of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee conference which opened on 14 October these negotiations between King and Kennedy took place through many phone calls by staffer campaign staffer Harris Wofford King agreed at the back up so King uh and and President Kennedy were talking we're negotiating through offered to meet King signaled that or actually Walker proposed Nashville King says okay that's something enough for me but the howling of southern politicians led JFK to say no that's to Southern so then Wofford proposed Miami King was unhappy but said he'd do it but he he was obliged to offer Nixon a meeting and Jo say uh-uh

not me I'm taking a much greater risk in the south and Nixon if King wants to treat us as equals tell him it's off so JFK scold the meeting and then he was available to do what the snick students were asking to do come join us at the

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were asking to do come join us at the city and he did and he was the first to be arrested the first to speak in court of Judge James D Webb who set bond at $250 pending trial by the way there was not another City before the election so if he doesn't go to that one there is no president Ted it doesn't happen King chose jail rather than bail embodying the essence of course of non-violence he spent the first night of his life in jail that night five days later to George Georgia dropped the charges but the rest of King was rolled into a previous traffic misdemeanor in another County on 4 May 1960 police stopped me in the cal county he discovered I still I still had an Alabama driver's license they gave me a ticket I had gone to court the lawyer pleaded guilty for me they fined me $25 and placed me on six months probation I never knew that the lawyer had pleaded guilty he made me think it was clear and all I needed to do is pay Kings lawyers later discovered that the DeKalb County had never arrested or fined anyone on such a charge he was the first time that ever happened King had been singled out for the dispensation of justice DeKalb style DeKalb County territory was terrifying to African Americans who knew that County officials sanctioned Ku Klux Klan parades through the corridors of the courthouse the atmosphere felt it more like a murder trial than a minor traffic case solicitor Jack Smith demanded a harsh penalty saying the King had shown no

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penalty saying the King had shown no signs of penance or remorse after King's chief attorney Donnell Howell Howell well-presented character witnesses and cogent arguments Mitchell bang the gavel revoked King's probation and ordered him to serve four months at hard labor on state chain gangs beginning immediately the Reidsville crisis was another causal step in JFK serendipitous march to the White House had Kings transfer to Reidsville not taking place the two decisive phone calls by the Kennedy brothers the next the next causal link of the chain would never have taken place in the short run the more important call bizarre of Kay's in the long run the more dramatic calls of JFK's and that was Wofford scheme but frustrated by JFK's reluctance to take a more direct stand on civil rights Wofford sense that the danger to King provided a golden opportunity to make up for past mistakes Coretta King was nearly hysterical by the time she reached Harris Wofford she just received a phone call that Kim was allowed but arrival at the reasonable state prison but one phone call they had yanked him out of jail the middle of the night without a warning anyway the the african-americans in the chain gangs we had about a 50% chance of never found alive and particularly King who is the by this point the most popular african-american leader down there in the middle of cracker territory odds of him coming out alive we're very slim Kennedy Kings pregnant wife feared her

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Kennedy Kings pregnant wife feared her husband would be lynched stunned senator Kennedy now face the seemingly impossible task of balancing votes between northern African Americans and southern white bigots the Nixon campaign faced the same vexing problem and how these two candidates decided to handle this crisis crucially impacted one of the closest elections in US history senator Kennedy called Coretta King it's an interesting story most of the people the campaign didn't want any part of this and so they read a motel by an airport and Wofford waited until they went to get some food and Kennedy was still sitting on the bed and his uh his a night-night clothes and any total about the Carretas call and suggested why don't you you know call and he said find he picked up the phone did it when they came back they were very angry with Wofford because they understood that he had done that waiting for them to walk out of the room the other call was made the next day by the president's brother who had actually been criticizing Wofford and Sargent Shriver who had married into the Kennedy family incidentally at eunice Kennedy was a major officer of the campaign as well and a louis-martin a third person that was involved with the civil rights aspect of the campaign RFK

been criticizing them for pushing too hard on that front and so when he found out what was going on at the Cal County it was more than he could take and he picked up the phone called the judge and why can't he be bonded out is what he asked the judge

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bonded out is what he asked the judge and the judge apparently didn't feel like getting any visibility for the Cal County and himself and so he did so that call gets him out of jail that call is not made even if King lives we're not going to have the election of President Kennedy there's not going to be a little bomb it's not going to be any of that stuff because Kings not going to be there that'd be quoted saying things that are going to help put Kennedy over the top as you'll see [Music] yeah he just burned me up he was on an airplane when he when he heard about it and then I made the call this is Martin Luther King talking about it later senator Kennedy did it because he saw them Jean Genet now because of his humanitarian bet he had come to know me as a person in the debates he had done a good job when he talked about civil rights of with the negro faces at the same time I think he naturally had political considerations in mind he was running for an office and he needed to be elected and I'm sure he felt the need for the Negro votes continuing King here it indicated the direction that this man would take if he became president oh this is excuse me I left something out here this he's talking now about Nixon Nixon declined to do anything to make any public comments about the King situation and so what this is again later Martin Luther King to dr. King saying it indicated the direction that next one would take if he became president he'd been supposedly close to me and would call me frequently seeking my advice and yet when the moment came was like he had never heard of me this is why I really considered him a moral coward and I am convinced that he lost

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coward and I am convinced that he lost the election because of that [Music] okay the background for the what else was going on with this is is interesting before the brothers calls Georgia governor Ernest Vandiver told JFK he would get King out of jail if JFK would not make a public statement but then JFK ordered his staff not and he did order staff not to make a statement but then when Kennedy the governor's started dragging his feet and that's when Wofford and Martin and Shriver jumped in to the situation okay doing good despite Robert Kennedy's bare-knuckled scoldings Wofford Martin and Shriver still held their jobs in the campaign these events had not led to a public uproar from southern politicians in short the Kennedy organization was now poised to reach a decisive breakthrough incredibly it was as though the Reidsville crisis had opened the final gate to some sort of alternate dimension

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gate to some sort of alternate dimension in space-time at the last minute the Kennedy campaign civil rights team set about developing a stealth scheme designed to flood America african-american voters with the Kennedy side of the Kincaid's in a way that minimized the danger of a backlash among white voters they planned to print a pamphlet behind both Kennedy brothers backs for mass distribution to black churches on the last Sunday before the presidential election they would run no newspaper rats would do anything else likely to filter into the white or black presses a dummy committee of preachers would protect the campaign against being identified as the sponsor pamphlet they would include no statement from a Kennedy spokesman it would not even mention Robert Kennedy's call of the judge this is the statement of Kings father who had been a staunch Republican reporter and this is his reaction as a Baptist I was going to vote against John Kennedy because it was Catholic but if he had the courage to wipe the tears from my daughter-in-laws eyes and I have the courage to vote for him Catholic or not I've got a whole suitcase full of hopes that I'm taking up and putting in the lap of John Kennedy back

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the this is the blue bomb and you can look at it later over in the corner there this is the front cover of it and these these are the testimonies of the Kings and this is a dr. King himself saying that he's indented deeply to Senator Kennedy who served as a great force in making my release possible so I need to go back we offer directed the printing of 2 million pamphlets at sites across the country half a million printed in Chicago alone pamphlets were shipped to their final locations on by Greyhound bus out of side of the press and campaign experts the blue bomb spread quickly through the best african-american medium church everywhere in the african-american community the church bells of the kennedy intervention were raining on the Sunday before the election all across the country the blue bomb pamphlets were distributed outside african-american churches after enthusiastic worship services were over the result was an unanticipated and stunning upset to change the course of history hard work chiefly the civil rights section led by Sargent Shriver and Harris Wofford masterstroke of intervention not only refers African American difference to Kennedy gave him the largest share of a black vote that ever had

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in analyzing the black vote almost all analyses agree that seven out of ten african-americans voted for Kennedy for president traditionally they had been voting with the Republicans Jackie Robinson campaign for Nixon and if the election had been held without any these things happening but I've talked to you about the night that's about what would have happened the same thing that happened about the same amount of votes less than half maybe a lot less than half would have gone to the to Kennedy and the rest would go on to Nixon we hear about an Illinois the Mafia stealin some ballot boxes in the south side of Chicago and warm one and that's probably true there's a lot of evidence for it but when you look at and that's only a couple of ballot boxes by the way but it was a closed edge in the whole state of Illinois nine thousand votes separated two candidates when you understand that 250,000 black votes were forecast for Kennedy when it would have ordinarily been about 80,000 at tops it doesn't matter all the other things you can put on the table that may have affected the outcome of that if that doesn't happen the blue bomb doesn't get circulated the churches he doesn't get the state of Illinois Perry and he doesn't get seven states actually seven states if you read White's book on the election he doesn't every every election cycle he doesn't walk long on the results seven states had the same time he's the same type of working here at Michigan and South Carolina if those states that had just split 50-50 between Kennedy Nixon seven states that went to County would have gone Linux it would have been a landslide victory for Kennedy instead it took till the next morning to figure out who won Libby Kennedy there's more statistics in

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Libby Kennedy there's more statistics in the South too the Democratic vote jumped from 36% of 56 to 67% in 1960 so thinking about this and having done a lot of work on the Kennedy presidency and volume three to a clue just about every aspect of the new frontier and chapter one which is one giving it right now chapter one is actually the election of 1960 chapter six is the Freedom Rides they have everything else chapters on Berlin chapters on a lot that was taking place all the good stuff that we're studying the semester in the 60s class in any event I'm left wondering about a weird dichotomy here and one part of it is to think about the bad things that didn't happen but which would have happened had Kennedy not been elected had grace not been an issue those bad things would included the continued plundering of the earth's resources which we'd been doing for hundreds of years especially in the 1800s and 1900s the I the Monroe Doctrine set up some ten pop dictators here and you know US corporations that get all their resources for pennies on the dollar backed up by a you know dictatorial military regime that would have been one thing that that would have continued and it did Kennedy put an end to it with his foreign policy of helping low-interest loans to the Middle American and South

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loans to the Middle American and South American countries and and endorsing more progressive leaders there they're also they're also would have not been peace in in either hemisphere of our planet and then if you think about the good things that did happen when the course of history did change and that that wouldn't have had an I hadn't raced not played this role in the election it's just amazing the new frontier the Keynesian economics increased minimum wage depressed areas development proposals for Medicaid Medicare increased Social Security benefits the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress tiwa South America and virtually no wars crucially not versa crucially no wars would have occurred in Cuba Laos and Vietnam so it's a big deal this election and the way it changed history but not for long but I'm left marveling to the sky this disquieting poster if Robert Kennedy surreptitious called the judge Mitchell played the key role

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